

The Millionaire's Ball

She stood out, you had to admit that. In a crowd of people in suits and eveningwear with nicely-combed hair and demure smiles, she stood out as if a spotlight was shone upon her. Which, come to think of it, might well have been the case. Her hair was purple and spiky, her clothes ragged and flopping in all directions, one layer upon the next, each going inside and outside the other in a mockery of the very concept of layers.

She must have made her money in the dot-coms, he figured. That was the way the odd ones broke into the club nowadays. In the old days the new money was made through theft and abuse of office. Now any random computer programmer — or even the people who hung around them — could find themselves saddled with a pile of cash. What was that new site he'd read about in the paper? Something about teens talking to their computers selling for a billion dollars?

Not that he minded, really. The place needed some new blood.

He strode over, straightening the lines of his suit as he did so — a habit, he quickly realized; in this case the gesture seemed a bit superfluous. She was standing by the wall, fiddling with her drink, looking cautiously out at the surroundings. "Hello?" she said tentatively, unsure if the tall handsome man was really speaking to her. "Hello," he said in a deep gentlemanly voice and bowed. There was an awkward moment or two as he stood kneeling at her feet. She wasn't sure what she was supposed to do here. Then she kneeled down as well and looked at him conspiratorially. "Maybe we should get out of this place," she whispered, grinning.

They both stood back up and glided to the door. He helped her into the car and had the driver take them back to his place, one of those buildings for the wealthy in the center of Manhattan. "Hello Jeeves," he said to the butler at the door, before they begun dashing up the stairs. "Is his name really Jeeves?" she asked him. "Oh yes," he assured her. "We made him change it."

They quickly reached his room, a stark and modern affair that nonetheless managed to signal extreme wealth. They fell into designer chairs and he removed his coat. "Would you like a cigarette?" he asked. "Oh yes," she replied. He removed a green piece of paper from a box on the shelf and rolled it with tobacco. He handed one to her and offered her a light before taking one himself. It smelled funny and as she removed it from her mouth she saw why — it was a crisp one hundred dollar bill.

He saw her eyes go wide as she looked at it and laughed. "You don't burn money where you come from?" he asked. "I have to admit," she said, "the idea had never occurred to me." "Oh, it's quite enjoyable," he said, removing the entire stack of hundred dollar bills and lighting it on fire.

She stared at the flame, unsure of what to do. On the one hand, she was aghast at the wastefulness of the thing. But at the same time it was somehow incredibly alluring. Lighting money on fire — it was like pornography for the rich. Her eyes went wide and he leaned in close for a kiss, the flames still dancing behind his head.

"What else do you do?" she asked, entranced. "Well, we could flush some down the toilet, I suppose," he said, "but I've got something even better." "Jeeves, ready the car," he said into the intercom on the wall, before dashing down the stairs again.

The car dropped them off along the water. She wasn't quite sure where; her sense of the city wasn't particularly good. They strode, arm-in-arm, breathing in the elegance of the moment. "It's wonderful," she said, "but I don't see—". "Just wait," he assured her. They saw a cop up ahead, strolling towards them, and in plain view he walked over to a building and ripped a small statue straight off and presented it to her as a gift.

The officer's face hardened. "Sir!" he insisted. "Oh, officer!" he said, as if he hadn't noticed him before. "How good to see you." "You can't be stealing things right off of buildings," the officer said gruffly. "Oh, you know I can," he replied. "I can do much more than that." The officer looked increasingly angry. "I'll give you ten thousand dollars," he said, pulling out his checkbook, "if you take off all your clothes."

The officer's eyes darted back and forth, unsure of what to do. But when he saw the check, he began complying. He really could use the money. She laughed and he whispered in her ear. She smiled and began looking through her bag. "Smile!" she cried when he was done and snapped a picture. He saw the officer's eyes go wide and seized the moment to grab his clothes and toss them into the water. They both began laughing. The officer tried to avoid crying. "What about my check?" the officer pleaded. He began to hand it to him, before snatching it back and tearing it in two. He tossed it into the air and then they pivoted and walked away laughing.

They headed back into the car to one last stop for the night, pulling up outside some nightclub she'd never heard of. Attractive young men and women about their age were dancing to some heavy electronic-sounding beat. He got up on a table. "Excuse me," he said, "excuse me! I have here a check for one hundred thousand dollars. Come over here for a chance to win it." They all stopped dancing and came over. Now he had them in his paw. He made them jump for the check, then he made them get down on their knees and bark for it like dogs. And they complied — a hundred twenty-somethings in trendy clothing, all down on their knees barking. She'd never seen anything so funny in her life.

He did a few more rounds of this before finally tossing the check into the middle of the pile. Everyone lunged for it as he climbed down from the table and made his getaway. "Was it a real check?" she asked. "Oh yes," he said, "but by the time anyone gets it it'll be torn to shreds."

Back at the apartment he lifted her off the floor and tossed her onto the bed. He climbed on top and began untwisting her layers of clothing, both going at each other ferociously.

She woke up the next morning, lying next to him in bed. He was smiling, gazing at her face. She was racked with guilt. "Look," she said. "There's something I have to tell you. I'm not who you think I am." He gazed into her eyes, slightly puzzled, and she was about to explain when they heard some scratching at the door.

He jumped up, just in time to be standing nude as the police burst in with bulletproof vests and guns. "Mr. Januski," one shouted, "you're under arrest for the creation of counterfeit US tender and check fraud." They cuffed his hands behind his back and began dragging him away. "Wait," he said, "you're not even going to let me get my clothes on?" "No," said an officer, who he soon recognized to be the one from last night. "Now let's go." They dragged him out the door as she sat there in shock.

Finally, she got up and put her clothes back on and then set about going carefully through the room, tossing everything of value into her purse. When she'd done a thorough job, she locked the door behind her dashed down the stairs. "Goodbye, Jeeves," she said, as she exited the building.

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